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ABSTRACT

This case study examined changes which have taken place at two independent colleges founded by Catholic religious orders (referred to respectively as "Josephite College" and "Jesuit College") and the effects of those changes on the Catholic character and identity of each college. The study involved interviews with faculty members and administrators as well as members of the founding religious orders, and analysis of written records. The theoretical concepts of organizational culture and an adaptive/interpretive model were used to interpret findings. The tendency of previously Catholic schools to become independent in order to receive state aid was examined as were societal trends toward increased secularization. It was concluded that Josephite College exhibits a weak Catholic culture whereas Jesuit College demonstrates a strong Catholic culture. Gradual changes in goals, governance, and mission over time were seen to be causing these institutions to evolve into different entities. Analysis of the two schools and recommendations for maintaining Catholic identity are offered in relation to government aid, growth and diversity, leadership, presence of religious personnel, and religious sponsorship. Includes 20 references. (DB)

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CATHOLIC IDENTITY AT RISK: CASE STUDY OF TWO COLLEGES

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CATHOLIC IDENTITY AT RISK:
CASE STUDY OF TWO COLLEGES

What at one time appeared the most obvious, today has become the most difficult to describe - the "Catholic" character of many colleges and universities throughout the United States. As the number of priests, nuns, and religious brothers on college faculties continues to decline, the fear of many trustees, alumni and Catholic Church leaders is that the Catholic identity of their institutions will dissipate into secularism.

Difficulty in defining "Catholic" character has been compounded within the last three decades by the rapid changes within the Catholic Church and the social upheaval in the United States. As a college chaplain (1989) stated:

> First of all, I think that the question of identity of any Catholic institution, at least in the United States, is a debatable question. Secondly, it's a critical question from the perspective of the Church identity (Interview).

This struggle for self-identification within the Church, as well as in Catholic colleges, is grounded in the directives of the official Church. Catholic educators responded to the 1963 Vatican Council (the governing body of the Catholic Church) by focusing on intellectual development and individual responsibility, hopefully enlightened by Christian truths, instead of on formal instruction in Church dogmas, rigid moral codes, and unquestioning obedience to the Catholic Church.

Furthermore, no one could have foretold in the mid-1960s that the decline in the number of personnel in religious communities would have had such strong repercussions on the

"Catholic character." Rather than approaching my study with specific hypotheses, I had some basic assumptions concerning the phenomenon of Catholic character, namely a liberal arts program, its relationship to the official Church and ways of expressing it (rituals and involvement in social justice). Whyte (1982) refers to these assumptions as "orienting theory":

> It is impossible to do research without theory because, at the outset of any project, theory indicates what phenomena are important to study..[T]o plan a project [a researcher needs] orienting theory - orienting in the sense it indicates what phenomena deserve particular attention and what other phenomena can be disregarded or be accorded less attention (p. 275).

My research, two independent colleges founded by religious congregations, describes the changes that have taken place and the effects of those changes on the Catholic character or identity of each college. I refer to the one founded by a group of women religious as "Josephite College" and to the second as "Jesuit College." The rationale for using the specific designation of "Jesuit" is to indicate not only a particular religious order of men but also a particular style of liberal arts education that may have influenced the ethos of the second college. Both colleges became independent of their affiliation with the founding religious orders when they chose to accept state aid. For over nine months I probed the views of a number of faculty members, administrators, and members of the founding religious orders at both colleges, recording their interviews which I later transcribed and analyzed. In addition I observed faculty meetings, social as well as religious events on the

campuses, commencements, faculty convocations, and all-campus forums. I also held informal conversations over lunch with other members of the college communities, including students.

Recognizing that a group's actions and perceptions are related to the history of its organization as concluded by Tierney (1987), I read minutes of trustee meetings, accreditation reports, state education department reviews, communications with sponsoring religious orders and with other college constituencies, as well as yearbooks, newspapers, journals, recruitment materials, and news releases. Eventually I began a formal analysis of my data, coding patterns and examining recurrent themes. Finally, in order to check for validity in the interpretation of the data, I asked selected participants to read parts of the report. I safeguarded the promised anonymity of my interviewees, colleges, and situations by using disguised names for the institutions and the events.

I used two theoretical perspectives to analyze the accounts. The first, organizational culture, provided a framework for the research; the second, Chaffee's (1984) adaptive/interpretive model, supplied another interpretation for the changes within the organization.

Bull (1933) described Catholicism as a "culture" that impacts the intellectual, spiritual, and moral development of its followers:

> The function of the Catholic college is ... to send forth men and women who are stamped with certain [Catholic] traits which come into play and govern their approach to life in every sphere; Catholicism is not merely a creed, but a

culture (p. 477).

Accordingly, I used Kuh and Whitt's (1988) definition of "culture":

> ...the collective, mutually shaping patterns of norms, values, practices, beliefs, and assumptions that guide the behavior of individuals and groups in an institute of higher education and provide a frame of reference within which to interpret the meaning of events and actions on and off campus (p. 13).

By observing the manifestations of culture, namely the symbols, rituals, myths and sagas (Clark, 1980; Masland, 1985), I examined Catholic ethos in the light of the societal mores, economic turndowns, and reforms within the Catholic Church since 1965. I hoped that by describing the culture I would be able to identify the Catholic character and observe its significance in the day to day workings on each campus.

Chaffee's adaptive/interpretive model in dealing with strategic changes is grounded in the social-contract view of organizations. The interpretive aspect focuses on the shared values of the college community rather than on the goals of the institution. In her case study of "Harmony College," Chaffee writes of a liberal arts Catholic college that incorporated several strategic changes in order to adapt to the environment. Chaffee comments on the shared values of the faculty:

> Only a few of the faculty are members of the founding order. But their personal characteristics and the values of the order expressed through them are important themes in the life of the college. The lay faculty are said to be equally dedicated to the values of the order and to the college (p. 111).

In the light of Chaffee's model, strategic changes would be

considered less of a threat to Catholic character of the institutions than many seem to believe.

Background

Many bishops, responsible for the teaching mission of the Church, encouraged religious orders to establish colleges in their dioceses and left the operation and governance of these colleges to the orders (Power, 1972). Each religious order, whether of men or women, expressed Catholic character within the context of their own history and culture; each had its peculiar charism or mark of distinction which identified it and its institutions. For example, most alumni of Jesuit colleges know intuitively what is meant by "Jesuit" education: stress on independent thinking and ideals of excellence. Graduates of colleges/universities sponsored by the Franciscan order have been imbued with the Franciscan philosophy: repairing of the integrity of human nature and the alleviation of the needs of life. Religious congregations of women, however, developed a more generic type of Catholic identity; alumni of colleges founded by women religious seldom identify themselves with the charisms of the religious order. Hence, little distinction is made between the ideology of the Josephite Sisters or the Sisters of Mercy. Their colleges have a greater isolation vis-a-vis their religious communities.

Since 1970 many of these religious colleges were impacted by economic reversals. In order to qualify for government aid, many religious congregations incorporated their colleges with lay

governing boards and assumed the position of "sponsors." Sponsorship is an ongoing relationship whereby the sponsored institution and the religious congregation identify with each other to the public, giving to the institution the benefit of the name and reputation of the religious group (Larkin, 1984). To many this divestiture signaled the beginning of secularism.

However, loss of identifiable Catholic character has been a major concern for the Church in the United States for at least one hundred years. Sweeney (1965) describes the tension between those American bishops in 1889 who thought that Christianity could best be expressed through a liberal arts education and bishops who insisted on particular ways of teaching and being "Catholic." Sweeny quotes Bishop John Lancaster Spalding:

> The Catholic religion will cease to be a power in the world unless Catholics themselves become morally and intellectually alive. They must learn to understand that it is more important to do good than to do it in a particular way, more necessary that they should think than that they should think alike (p. 264).

Not everyone agreed with Spalding. In the early twentieth century, the fear that modernism and Americanism would eventually destroy the Catholic character of Catholic colleges and universities led Pope Pius X to condemn all forms of "modernism" in the form of historical and literary exegesis separate from dogma (Gannon, 1971).

Additional changes in the late 1960s surfaced strong forces leading to further secularization. Riesman and Jencks (1967) stated that the problems of secularization in Catholic colleges and universities were postponed, not solved. They claimed that

until the 1960s, ethnicity and first generation higher education students were the bulwarks of Catholic colleges. Catholic colleges did not have to contend with a diversity of faiths either on their faculty or in the student body. Catholic colleges for the most part were founded where there was a dense population of Catholic immigrants.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The ambiguous use of the word "Catholic" as it relates to colleges has posed several questions. Can a college be Catholic if is independent of the Catholic Church? How is a college Catholic in practice? How do faculty and students perceive a Catholic atmosphere today?

In this case study, I learned that the decisions made by presidents, trustees, and superiors of the founding religious orders, as well as the diversity among faculty and students, have, through the years, generated new and different expressions of "Catholic identity."

Much like the colleges in Kolman and Hossler's (1987) study of the influence of institutional culture on presidential selection, each of the colleges I researched revealed its own distinctive character based on its history and its adaptation to change. In its seventy year history, Josephite College has had several changes in mission, programs, and clientele which have contributed to what Clark (1980) might call a "weak culture." Once a strong, liberal arts college for women, Josephite College is now a medium-sized (over 3,000 students), coed institution

with many graduate and professional programs. Its Catholicism is perceived by the faculty, trustees, and administrators in the case study as ecumenical, liberal, and humanistic. Its faculty no longer have a unified perception of the Catholic character of the college:

> I don't think there is any kind of coordinated effort to celebrate the Catholic heritage on campus (Faculty, 1989).

Yet,Josephite College is regarded by those students and trustee-alumnae interviewed as an excellent educational institution which continues to provide quality education with a personal touch.

Although only forty-five years old, Jesuit College would classify as having a strong culture according to Clark's criteria of size and integration. It remains a small (under 2,000 FTE's) institution with a strong liberal arts program. Religious personnel, along with Catholic symbols and rituals, although fewer in number, are still obvious. According to the faculty in the study, there is a clear understanding of their shared values (liberal arts in the Catholic tradition) though they themselves are diverse (feminists, non-Christian and Protestant Christians):

> I know there are some faculty, who would proclaim themselves as non-Catholic or as non-religious, who will stand up [at faculty meetings] and say things like: "the Jesuit Catholic heritage at this College is very important. It should be preserved because it [sic] is a College in which it is appropriate and not at all an embarrassment to raise questions of values in the classroom" (Faculty, 1989).

As a theory base, Chaffee's (1984) adaptive/interpretive model indicated that changes would be less a threat to Catholic character if such changes were considered in the light of mission

and history before they were adapted. I now suggest, however, that changes have a continuous effect, and although institutions usually do not experience immediate transformation at the time of adaptation, gradual changes in goals, governance, and mission over a significant period of time may cause the institution to evolve into a different entity. Cameron and Whetten (1983) noted that "organizations make adjustments to their environments over time, but that adjustments cannot be anticipated" (p.281).

Government Aid

Twenty years after Josephite College qualified for government aid, several of those responsible for making the final decision regret having allowed the College to reach its present level of what they term "secularization." But many more trustees and almost all the faculty interviewed at Josephite College concur that the conditions necessary to qualify for aid had little effect on the Catholic character of the College. Other factors such as commitment to the Catholic heritage, vagueness as to the position of "sponsorship," size and diversity appeared to be more significant.

Similarly, ten years after Jesuit College made the required changes for government aid, those trustees, who in the 1970s were opposed to such action, now acknowledge that their fears had been exaggerated. Their College has not only retained its identity as a Jesuit liberal arts college, it has actually strengthened its Catholic character without violating the criteria for institutional financial aid:

> We try to make the faith an intrinsic part of the college experience. Our emphasis on values, our campus ministry program, the retreat program, the values and faith of many of the faculty, both lay and Jesuit, come together to [our] weave a fabric of Catholicism (Trustee, 1989).

The key to understanding what happened at each college lies in the selection of the terms the colleges chose to define themselves when they accepted government money. Designating Josephite College as "Judaeo-Christian" pl ced it outside Catholicism into a broader culture that included all forms of Christianity as well as Judaism. Catholicism, therefore, became a subset of its Judaeo-Christian expression. Furthermore, the changed definition gradually led to the sponsoring order's loss of influence and placed the College in a different relationship with the Catholic diocese and its Bishop.

Jesuit College, by defining itself as "Jesuit," elected to move within the Catholic tradition to the subset of Jesuit expression, becoming more self-aware in its relationship to the sponsoring order, giving it a clear and deliberate sense of purpose.

Beyond Josephite and Jesuit Colleges

Zald's (1970) ethnographic study of the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) describes the evolution of this organization from its evangelization goal and close link to protestantism to a service association for all people of all ages. Zald attributes the character change to four factors: 1) the elimination of overtly religious programs, 2) lay control, 3) goal changes, and 4) external monetary support. Although the

YMCA has retained its name, it is no longer a church-related organization and its mission is purely secular in nature. Zald also found that the transformation was not without conflict, but as time went on with new and diverse lay board members, the tension between the original character and its new character eased.

Speculating on the future of the colleges in the case study, I see some parallels with the organizational change of the YMCA. Josephite College, now under lay control, is autonomous. The one-third membership of the sponsoring order may be a control factor slowing down the secularization process, but ambiguity among the religious order members prevents a clear-cut vision of what the College should be today in relation to its founders.

Only ten years have elapsed since Jesuit College accepted government aid, and the three presidents since 1980 have been Jesuit priests. The short time span and the religious presidents, however, may account for its apparent continuity of Catholic character. Jesuit College has had few goal changes and the majority of its lay trustees, though business and professional people, are either alumni or graduates of other Jesuit or Catholic colleges. Their responses in the interview sessions indicated an understanding of "Jesuit tradition" and its place within the Catholic Church. The trustees of Jesuit College, through workshops and conferences, have taken seriously their responsibility to maintain the Catholic identity of their college.

Perhaps the most striking disparity between the two colleges in their "independent" status is their connection with the bishops, the representatives of the Catholic Church. The change to independent status, coupled with a 1970 mis-communication with the Bishop, and its governance by lay presidents may account for a more distant relationship between the Church and Josephite College at the present time. The Bishop's presence at commencement means little more than a custom without meaning to the faculty ..."Why do we dress him in his red robes and put him on the stage?" There is little dialogue between the official Church and the College although the Bishop keeps informed through his representative on the Board of Trustees.

On the other hand, at Jesuit College I noticed a loose but collegial relationship between the Bishop and Jesuit College. Open dialogue between Church and College operationalized Donovan's (1966) definition of Catholic colleges:

> It [college] must do the thinking of the Church and [provide a place] where the sociology, theology, and movement of the Church get thrashed out openly, fully, rationally, and sympathetically (p. 24).

Recommendation

Considering Catholicism as a culture, rather than a creed, colleges can hope to retain their Catholic identity by developing creative ways to express their character. After the values audit, Jesuit College sought to identify the values they shared as faculty, administrators, and students in a Jesuit college. The fruit of that thorough study is the present-day Values Project, so widely received by the College community. It has

become one way for Jesuit College to express its Catholic culture.

Stressing more of an ecumenical character, the once strong Catholic culture of Josephite College has become noticeably weakened. Its mission statement declares its "Catholic heritage," but, beyond being an historical fact, the description has little or no meaning to a significant number of faculty and trustees I interviewed. Like the YMCA, Josephite College has moved away from its strong ties with organized religion and the religious order. Yet its Catholic chaplain is hopeful that its "Catholic heritage" will, with time, become more meaningful.

If an institution is to stay within the Catholic tradition, then the trustees and administration should decide how to manifest that tradition. Consensus should first be reached by those who are directly responsible for the integrity of the college - the trustees and administrators. They then need to work with the other constituencies, convincing them of the renewed focus and taking the necessary steps to accomplish an identity renewal.

Some of the implications of consensus would be reflected in the hiring practices. Before appointing presidents to colleges rooted in a Catholic culture, trustees will have to communicate the cultural heritage of the college and the shared assumptions upon which the college operates. Administrators, responsible for hiring faculty, will also have to consider the quality of the people hired, articulate the mission statement and ask applicants

if they are willing to commit themselves to the philosophy of education the college represents.

Growth and Diversity

In 1967 Riesman and Jencks prophesied that the problems of secularization in Catholic colleges and universities were postponed, not solved. At that time Catholic identity was sustained by ethnicity and first generation higher education students, but with broader recruitment policies, a different student body evolved throughout the 1980s, most noticeably at Josephite College. Americanization, standardization, and professionalization have broken down the differences between Catholic colleges and their public and independent counterparts. Josephite College responded to the educational needs of its environment throughout its seventy year history. With each response and program adaptation came more students; in each period of its growth the College adapted and integrated various types of students.

Jesuit College, on the other hand, resisted expansion through graduate programs, maintaining its niche as a small, undergraduate, liberal arts college. Although it offers a few professional and business programs, its main thrust is its humanities program. Consequently, Jesuit College has not experienced a noticeably changed clientele beyond the changes in students in general.

Both colleges have diverse faculty represented by differences in religion, ethnicity, race, gender, convictions,

and biases. Jesuit College has formally identified some of its values (results of their audit) and works to articulate others (Values Project).

The diverse faculty at Josephite College have their own set of values: focus on academia, social justice, individual care for their students. In general, however, they do not seem to value the Catholic heritage of the College; consequently, they make little effort to accentuate its Catholic character.

Recommendation

Though its Catholic character is questioned today, Josephite College has a Catholic priest from the diocese who works with students in planning liturgies, retreats, campus speakers, and ecumenical events. Other denominational ministers and a rabbi participate in religious programs for the diversified student body. The presence of a viable Campus Ministry program is important to Josephite students. Students are grateful that religion is no longer "forced down their throats" and willingly participate in the devotional, service, and instructional programs sponsored by Campus Ministry. At Jesuit College, the Campus Ministry program has three full-time chaplains, and many students are actively involved in all the sponsored programs.

If Catholic theology cannot be directly taught as part of the official curriculum, then a strong Campus Ministry program can fill the instructional gap with discussions, speakers presenting both sides of issues, opportunities for service ministry, as well as creative ways to worship.

Strong implications are involved in maintaining an effective Campus Ministry program, not the least of which is financial support. Commitment on the part of administrators is first and foremost. Taking their cues from the president are the trustees who, by their presence at Campus Ministry-sponsored events, support the concept of Campus Ministry. Faculty, too, signify by their presence that they value the spiritual as well as the intellectual development of individuals.

Since the Mass remains the central symbol of Catholicism as evidenced in the importance given to it especially at Jesuit College, administrators and faculty should allot time and space to recognize the unifying nature of this symbol. Jesuit College at present, with its relatively large number of clergy (Jesuits) available to offer Mass, has little difficulty in sustaining this ritual, but Josephite College with twice the enrollment of Jesuit College has only two priests (a chaplain and a faculty member). It is therefore critical for Josephite College today, and Jesuit College in the future, to communicate with the Bishop and enter into dialogue to ensure that Mass will be provided for the college community.

Leadership

In their study of the influence of institutional culture on the presidential search, Kolman and Hossler (1987) concluded that presidential searches were influenced by the culture of the institution, its underlying institutional values. The very nature of "lay" people in top-level administrative positions in

College in a direction no one could have anticipated. The optimism of its current chaplain, in looking for new symbols and a relevant Catholicism, may reinforce the links between College and the Church. The mission of the founding religious order in serving the people through the ministry of teaching, counseling, and social services may then continue with lay personnel.

Recommendation

From the foregoing discussion, the following recommendations follow: 1) to ensure the Catholic character of a college, trustees must understand the institutional culture well enough so that at the time of a presidential selection, there will a "fit" between the culture and the next president; 2) administrators should identify those characteristics that describe a particular college as Catholic, and devise a process whereby they and the faculty can clarify and articulate those traits; 3) trustees should elect to the Board those members, regardless of their religious affiliation, who have an understanding of and a commitment to continuing the Catholic identity of their college.

Presence of Religious Personnel

Almost all those interviewed at Jesuit College admitted that the presence of Jesuit priests was an important aspect of the Catholic character of the college. Jesuits themselves acknowledged that their common residence on campus and their availability for students in student residence halls is vital to the Catholic identity. Trustees regret that fewer men are answering the call to become Jesuit priests, threatening

continued religious presence.

At Josephite College, although there are some members of the religious order on the faculty and staff, few actually live on campus. Their visibility is not as obvious as that of the priests on Jesuit's campus. Because so few sisters live on campus, college administrators asked the women to vacate their residence on the campus in order to provide needed office space. Several Jcsephite College trustees, nonetheless, believe that the presence of religious personnel in administration and on the faculty is needed to retain a Catholic identity.

If the presence of religious personnel is as critical as some trustees at both colleges claim it is, and if fewer men and women are entering religious orders today, what are the implications in the future for the Catholic character at many colleges and universities? The question is whether lay men and women can replace religious personnel as guardians of the religious heritage and conveyers of the culture's inherent values to generations that follow.

Zald (1970) did not find this lay commitment to religious values in his study of the YMCA. Historically, YMCA placed emphasis on the role of laymen in governing the Association. As Protestant denominations developed "new interpretations of the gospel and Christian ethics, the YMCA remained untouched" (p. 66). The loose link between the Protestant churches and the Association proved ineffective in maintaining the religious character of the YMCA. Today it serves its clientele as a

secular institution.

The comparison leads one to theorize on the possibility of secularization of some of today's Catholic colleges in the absence of religious personnel and a strong sponsor-college relationship. Histories of church-related colleges reveal similar organizational changes where religious denominations have separated themselves from their institutions (Hassel, 1983).

Recommendation

Because no one can foresee the number of religious personnel available for higher education institutions, trustees and presidents must assume a guardianship role of the Catholic identity. A close relationship with the Church is vital with a clear understanding that the college is governed by trustees and that academic freedom must be preserved. Presidents and deans must have a clear understanding of the organizational culture and the philosophy of the college and hire those faculty who can work comfortably, regardless of their personal differences, within the organization's culture.

Religious Sponsorship

If colleges founded by religious orders are to remain true to their heritage at a time when religious personnel are dwindling and more and more lay people are employed in all aspects of the college, then sponsoring religious communities must make clear their role in sustaining the Catholic character of the institution.

Foreseeing the decreased numbers in their order, the Society

of Jesus in 1964 restructured the relationship of their institutions with the Society, giving each college board autonomy, but secured the Jesuit tradition through the commitment of its board members.

Recommendations

There are several suggestions regarding effective sponsorship. First, religious orders must identify criteria that ought to be operative: evidence of values held by the order. Secondly, the Board of Trustees must be effective in representing the philosophy and mission of the congregation. Third, the college should share information on its mission and identify itself publicly with the congregation and its mission (Jesuit Tradition, Catholic heritage).

Attention to Catholic identity is critical if the purposes for which the institution was founded are to be sustained. Facing further declines in the numbers of men and women entering religious orders, religious congregations must act now if lay men and women are expected to carry on the mission of the founding religious orders.

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